

Q: So, good afternoon. Today is June 1st, 2017. My name is Kim Hewitt and I'm here with Paul Lipsitt in Newton City Hall. Together we're participating in the Newton Talks Oral History Project that is being conducted with the Newton Free Library, Historic Newton, and the Newton Senior Center. So, Paul, can you tell me about your connection to Newton?

A: My connection to Newton is primarily through my wife, because she was a, on the Board of Alderman here, she was an elected official and became President for the last six years of her term. She was there 12 years in entirety. But it's sort of coincidental that we happened to move to Newton when we did, although she grew up here, so it really was her hometown. It was not my hometown. But once we got here she became active in the local affairs, she probably had been involved even before then, because she always was interested in civic activities. So that's how we're, that's why we're here, and now that we're here we can't leave, because she is still very active. She is President of the Zoning Board now, the Chairman.

Q: So can you tell us where you were before and what you were doing before you entered the service?

A: Well, I grew up in Marion, Massachusetts, which is a little town down in Buds Bay, and my family moved there from New Bedford when I was 12, and I think one of the incentives to move there was that Tabor Academy is in Marion and it was eventually five boys in the family, it was a school that they thought would be good to go to. At that time it was the primary school in Marion, so it was, even though it was a boarding school, a private school, if you were "a townie" you could go there for practically nothing, which is very different than it is today.

And so we lived there until I went into the service. When I graduated from Tabor Academy, which was a Naval school, we wore Navy uniforms, so it was an easy transition, I continued to wear a Navy uniform. I joined the Navy when I was 17 and it was, it turned out to be towards the end of the Second World War. We didn't know at that time that the war was going to be over

pretty soon. I enlisted in the service actually in September of 1944 and stayed there until July 5, 1946, so I was one of the last to get out of the service, because at that time they had what they called points, and somebody who had been there only a short time and I was discharged before I actually finished my training. And it's hard to believe it now, but those of us who didn't finish that training and the war was over, we had the sense of disappointed that we missed out, that we hadn't really served, we served but we never got overseas, we never-- the only time we ever shot a gun was in Boot Camp for practice.

Q: So you kind of already spoke to this, but is there any other reasons you decided to choose the Navy over other branches?

A: Well, we lived on the water all my life, and I liked the waterfront, and frankly I didn't want to be in the Army, so I wanted to be in the Navy. And they had wonderful training programs as well and I was fortunate to get into one of the training programs to train as an aviation electronic technician, and that's what I did when I finally finished the training, worked on aircraft, repairing electronic equipment, altimeters and transceivers and all of that electronic equipment they use on airplanes. You get a little note from the pilot sometimes that would say, "The transceiver works very well within shouting distance of the airport," something like that.

Q: Was there anything that you found difficult to adapt to Navy life?

A: Not really. It's hard to believe that now, that I never thought of myself as a military person, but it was a time when we felt it was the right thing to do to go into the service. Almost everybody in my class, it was a small class, I think there were 44 in the class, and except for one or two that had physical disabilities all of us enlisted Army, Navy, Marine, Coast Guard, Merchant Marines, and if you look at our senior book it lists what everybody was doing and hardly anybody said, "I'm going to college." They said they were going into the service. It was a different time, obviously.

Q: Where exactly did you serve and do you remember arriving and what it was like?

A: Yeah, I served in a lot of places that were far away from the coast. I went to Boot Camp in Sampson, New York, and then went to what they call Pre Radio School in Chicago, which was a one-month course, and then we had what they called Primary School, which was to learn more about physics and electronics and all of those things, that was at Oklahoma A&M, which is now I think Oklahoma State University, and then I got into the Aviation branch, because I went for my second, what they called a Secondary Electronics Training, at Corpus Christi, Texas, and that was seven months. So you can see it was probably one of the more extensive programs that the Navy had to train people to be electronic technicians. So I was an aviation electronic technician.

Q: How did you stay in touch with family and friends back home?

A: That's a good question. Writing mainly, writing letters. I didn't use a telephone too much. And my parents were good at corresponding and wrote regularly, and I was always in the States, so after the electronic technician training I was stationed at a place called Olathe, Kansas, which is the exact center of the United States, and it was with an organization, a Naval organization called Naval Air Transport Service, or NATS, and stayed there almost until the time of discharge, until I was discharged in '46.

So I corresponded pretty regularly with my parents, and my mother saved all those letters so now I have huge pile of-- I was thinking of someday putting them together and maybe putting together like some kind of a memoir of all the letters, because she never threw, and I was the same way, I never threw away letters, so I have their letters and she saved their letters, my mother and my father. My father used to send me letters. He was, he typed two fingers. He had been a reporter in a newspaper before he went to Law School, so he typed with two fingers, and sometimes it would be just a letter to me, but I had four brothers, so sometimes he used carbon

paper and made copies. In those days you used carbon paper. And so he would write on the typewriter.

Q: Can you tell me about a few of your most memorable experiences, positive or negative?

A: In the service?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, let's see. Well, I got into, there were situations I had, I think I got into a little spat with a guy in Boot Camp. It wasn't serious, but we had an argument, and I don't know whether we exchanged, I can't remember whether we ever exchanged any blows or not, but it was not serious. So that. But my experience was very positive, I thought. But the thing was the courses were very, very challenging and they were hard, I mean really. I think I worked harder to pass these courses in the Navy than I did in college. It wasn't an area that I thought that I was that fluent in, that terrific in, but I was good enough to get into the program. You had to take a test to get in, the test was some mathematics and some understanding of basic electricity and that sort of thing. So I was able to get in, but really had to work hard to keep up with it, because if you didn't do well on those you could flunk out.

And they used to have this saying, your son is a Naval RT. He'll never be wounded in action finding the square root of three. But that was private. The other was if you flunked out you were going to end up on some kind of a landing craft in the South Pacific. But by that time the war was over, so it wasn't like it was going to be that dangerous.

So, in terms of the experience right now when I think back at it it seems like a completely other world. It's hard to, it's hard to think of myself back there again, because it was like living on a different planet in a way, thinking of it now. At the time it seemed perfectly natural and I was

never homesick, I enjoyed where I was. I went and saw different parts of the country, actually went, when I was stationed in Olathe, Kansas I actually went to a baseball game in Kansas City, and-- What's the name of that great-- It was the Monarchs. They were a Black team. And the fellow that pitched was amazing. He could throw a pitch through his legs. And the guy was out. And what was his name? I'm blocking on his name, but he became famous. He was, he ended up when finally they lifted the color ban--

__: Satchel Paige?

A: What's his name?

__: Satchel Paige?

A: Satchel Paige, thank you. It was Satchel Paige, that's who it was. He ended up playing for the Red Sox, I think, for the very end of his career, or maybe it was some other team. So, being in the service I had no really tyrannical experiences. It was quite positive. And met some good friends, although most of them you were with them for a few months and then one or the other would go one way or the other, so it was hard to maintain friendships in the service, at least in that part of the service. I know some areas people went through the whole war together.

So, as I say, I was discharged on July 5, because they didn't discharge anybody on July 4th, it was the holiday, and then I planned to go back to school, but getting out in July and trying to get into college was not easy, because all of the veterans were going back to school, at least many were going back, and they had the GI Bill, so there were many veterans who went back to college or went to college who never would have gone to college otherwise without the GI Bill. So that was an amazing thing. But by the time I got out and since I did not try to apply while I was in the service I applied to a few schools, but they said, "No more room. Applications are full. It's too late."

So, I figured, “Well,” I felt resigned that I was going to have to stay home, at least for that semester, maybe for a year, and then get into school a year later. And then some friends came down to visit us in Marion and they were all going to college and said, “Where are you going to go to school, Paul?” And I said, “Well, I haven’t gotten into schools I wanted to go to, so I guess I’m going to have to stay home.” He said, “Well, why don’t you apply to Brown?” I said, “Are you kidding?” He said, “No, no. They’re having a special section of the entering class now will go into what they call the Veterans College. So you ought to apply to that and go there.”

So, I followed their advice and went up to the school and they gave you a test. It was called the Miller Analogies test. It was this is to this and this is to that. And if you passed that test they didn’t even ask you for your high school record or anything previous to your going to college. If you passed that you got in if you were a veteran.

So, then I went home. This is now August. And I waited and waited and waited, and I didn’t hear anything. So, I said, “Well, I guess I didn’t pass the Miller Analogies test.” And my mother says, “I don’t believe that.” She couldn’t believe that I couldn’t pass. So, she said, “You better go up to Providence and find out what happened.” So I went up there and went into this little office. The Head of the Veterans College was there, sitting at a little desk in a room about one-tenth the size of this, this little tiny room. And I said, “I’m Paul Lipsitt.” And he said, “Well, where have you been?” And I said, “Well, I didn’t hear anything.” He said, “Well, we sent you a telegram.” In those days we had telegrams. And I said, “Well I never got it.” So he said, “Well, you got a notice. Are you coming here?” I said, “Of course.” And so that’s how I got into college. And I had to pick up my books and register and find a place to live and start classes the next day. So that was kind of fun.

Q: So what was it like for you to return to civilian life?

A: It was easy. It's hard to say that. Once I got over the fact that I felt that I really hadn't contributed that much to the service, I did what I could do during the time that I was there, so getting back was easy. It was the summer. I was down in Marion. It's on the waterfront. And a lot of friends came down and a lot of friends were people who had been in the service too and going back to school, so it was a fairly easy transition, because the war was over, people were feeling very optimistic about things and looking forward to going to college. And some of my friends were first generation people, first generation immigrant parents, and would never have gone to college if it hadn't been for the GI Bill. And I knew some of them and they were amazing and later went on to really great careers, whereas before they went into the service, they were already out of school, they had quit school, they were working in the factory in New Bedford, we had some textiles there, and they would have spent their life working in the factory if it hadn't been for the GI Bill. So it's, for those people it was very transformative.

I came from a family where education was always primary, and so there was no question I was going to go to college. But it was not a difficult transition. I was in the service for 22 months, that's all. So, it was a good experience and I think I've learned a lot and grew up a lot in the service. I mean I felt like I was still a kid when I went in, and I was. When I enlisted I was, like I said, I was just 17, and my birthday was in August. They didn't call me until September 14, maybe September 21. It was the day of a big hurricane, that was the other thing. I mean it was one of the most traumatic things, because I was recruited to come to Boston to actually be sworn in on the day of the hurricane, and I said, "Oh my gosh, I'm going to get court marshalled before I even enlist, because how are we going to get to Boston?" So, my parents and I got in his car, my father drove us up. When I called them they said, "Well, get here as fast as you can." So, we did try to get up there and we did get up there, but we had to wait many times going through Rochester and some of the back roads. That was before there was a Route 24 and they were still cutting the trees out of the road, so it was a slow ride up to Boston, but I did get there. And it turned out to be hurry up to wait, because we didn't leave to go to Boot Camp until about

midnight that night. But I think that hurricane, that was in, that was the 1944 hurricane. I think it was September 14. The '38 hurricane was in September 21.

Q: So, how did your service and experiences there affect your life and your outlook on the military and war in general?

A: Well, I still felt that there was, in retrospect I thought that that was a war that was worth fighting. I don't think any other war that we have fought since then has been worth fighting, and certainly I don't believe that that is the way we're going to solve any problems at all. But that was, there was a reason for that war. What was going on in Europe was, could have been devastating for the whole world, what Hitler was doing, and we believed strongly in what Franklin D. Roosevelt was doing, and so it was a tremendous commitment. I think it was a full commitment and everybody wanted to participate. And women were participating much more than ever before. That was the beginning, I guess, in some ways of the Women's Movement.

So, I'm not, I'm certainly not pro, I'm not against the military, I think we have to have a military, but I don't feel that war is ever the answer now. And so I can't say that I would, I can't believe there can ever be another legitimate war. We'll have to see about that.

Q: What would you like people to know 100 years from now? Any wisdom you want to pass on?

A: Any wisdom, I don't know whether I have any wisdom. I would-- I have a daughter that is 38, she will be, or 37, she is 37, and I hope her children have a time that is better than it is right now. I think we're going through a transition period and in a hundred years out hopefully we can have a better planet, keep this planet safe. As I heard the Attorney General of Massachusetts say the other day, she said that there is no Planet B for us, this is it, this is where we're going to be, and we better save it, we better do the best we can, and we better deal with climate change and

we better have the best education system we can possibly have. I think those are the two main things.

Q: Are there any other memorable experiences you had that you want to share with us before we end?

A: Well, my wife and I have done a lot of traveling. She loves to travel. If I ever even mention a place to go she will say, "Well let's pack up and go." That's the way she is. And so we have been fortunate to travel a great deal, and traveled, one of the most fascinating places we have traveled is South Africa, Cape Town, and just recently we went to Cuba. So we have gone to a number of different places. And one of the nice things about it is that up until maybe 10 years ago we traveled quite a bit with some college friends and roommates of mine, and so these are people we kept in touch with all the years. It's always been great, so we have taken a couple of trips to Europe with them, traveling on the Mediterranean, we have been going west from Spain or east from Greece on cruise ships, but a lot of the trips were on land too as well as on sea, but keeping in touch with the good friends from college days has been very important.

Q: Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with us. We're really happy to be able to include you in the Newton Talks Oral History Project, so thank you.

A: Thank you very much for inviting me. It's been a pleasure. I didn't realize the time had gone that fast.

END OF INTERVIEW